

5. Charging and quotas

Given that university education (including Internet access) is free in some parts of the world, universities in developing countries should aim ultimately to provide Internet access to all students for free. However, this section describes why a case exists for charging for Internet access while bandwidth is still scarce and expensive.

A university may have enough funding to get a modest amount of bandwidth, and will allow as many students and staff as possible to use it. However, as is shown in this study, some people use large amounts of bandwidth, and the activities that take up the vast majority of their high usage are not academic (or even worthwhile) in many cases.

To limit the activities of these users, and to generate additional funding for bandwidth, it may be useful to give all users a bandwidth quota, and then allow them to pay if they need more during that month. In this way, users will not waste bandwidth with unnecessary activities, but will try to conserve their bandwidth in order to stay within their monthly quota.

If a prepaid system is implemented, the inclusion of a subsidized quota is essential because students must have some free access to the Internet.

The danger with this system, however, is that, in a university that really needs more bandwidth, management may feel that a technical solution could be implemented and that it is therefore not necessary for them to try to obtain increased funding for bandwidth. On the other hand, experience at the University of Zululand shows that prepaid access, and a system that produces good statistics, enables the IT department to present a case for more bandwidth to management because it gives them a sense that bandwidth issues are under control and money is well spent.

A few charging mechanisms are presented in Appendix A.